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Christianity And Communism And Progressive Calvinism

This issue and the next have a definite relation to each other as they are primarily on two phases of the same subject—brotherly or neighborly love.

How Can Christianity And Communism Have An Identical Law Of Neighborly Love?

In this issue, we relate some of the matters discussed at a meeting of a Reading Club to which we were invited. The experience was rewarding. Telling about this meeting gives us a natural opportunity to do what we should have done earlier, namely, repeat our interpretation of a major principle, to love our neighbor as ourselves, *which principle must be defined as we have defined it* if the definition of love by Christianity and by communism is not to be identical. For Christianity and communism to define "neighborly love" identically will require the acceptance of identical ethics. "...what communion hath light with darkness (II Corinthians 6:14b)?"

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PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM Is In The True Calvinist Tradition On Neighborly Love

We have defined neighborly love in various issues in 1955 definitely, specifically and clearly, *and strictly according to Scripture.* Calvinists presently do not generally define neighborly love definitely, specifically and clearly. Some actually have already adopted the communist love definition! But the suspicion may arise falsely against us that we in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM have a new and untraditional definition of neighborly love, and that it is we who are deviating.

To forestall false notions before they can develop, we plan in the September issue to show that PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM on the subject of neighborly love is perfectly in the tradition of Calvinism. To substantiate that we shall work over the ideas of an internationally famous sociologist, probably the most famous of the preceding generation. That September issue will be especially directed to "intellectuals." We shall show that PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM's definition of brotherly and neighborly love is nothing new but is *exactly the definition which has made Calvinism famous and successful.* fn

Questions Which Readers Ask

Learning From Men Who Think Independently

Sometime ago an old friend came in to find out whether I would meet with a small Reading Club of which he was a member. I agreed that sometime at mutual convenience I would meet with the Club. It was carefully decided that the meeting would be for "discussion" and not for speech-making. This article gives information on some subjects that were discussed. The list is not complete; omissions are because of lack of space.

A man learns practically nothing from people who agree with him. He can learn better from people who disagree, or

who are not convinced, and who have questions, than from those who already agree.

Solomon wrote (Proverbs 27:17):

> Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man
> sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

The men in this Reading Club and others who attended impressed problems and ideas on my mind which were enlightening and helpful. These men put forth an excellent effort to "sharpen our countenance." It is of inestimable value to deal with men who *think independently.*

Arrogance Versus Good Fortune Plus Confidence

This reminds us of something which should have been mentioned long ago. It pertains to whether we believe ourselves to be wise and others not to be. Have we special mental arrogance?

We are admittedly arrogant. Everybody is. We know the reason for our arrogance; it is given by Hobbes, towit:

> All mental pleasure consists in being able to compare oneself with others to one's own advantage.

Merely putting this unpleasant truth into words is sufficient.

We would not be happy if readers confused whatever unfortunate arrogance we have with the confidence we have in the worth of ideas we present. We are sure of those ideas not because of self-appreciation but because of conviction regarding their worth. Schopenhauer wrote:

> ...all other sufferings of the mind may not only be healed, but may be immediately relieved, by the secure consciousness of worth. The man who is assured of it can sit down quietly under sufferings that would otherwise bring him to despair...

We have a very "secure consciousness" of the worth of ideas which we present, which is something altogether different from arrogance.

Acknowledging that we have such a "secure consciousness" of the soundness of ideas which we present, what factor is there that *should* and does keep us from extreme arrogance? The answer is: what we have learned and now hold with conviction has become our knowledge through favorable circumstances. It was not our wisdom that provided us with that knowledge. Anyone who would know all the circumstances would say that we were "lucky," and in a proper sense of the term we certainly have been. If what is presented in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM is right—and we have a "secure consciousness" that it is—there is nevertheless no special merit in us just because we happen to present it. Our ideas are not original. If we can give an acceptable answer to questions, that is because of our favorable opportunities and experience. Other men, with the same opportunities we have had, would have done better than we have done.

Conduct Of The Meeting

We return to the meeting of the Reading Club which we attended.

Twenty-five or thirty men were present. The organizer of the meeting made a brief and excellent introduction. He turned the meeting over to the chairman, an educator. He made brief and excellent introductory remarks. Then he turned to the business to be transacted: discussion, questions and answers, arguments and explanations—the exchanging of ideas and the endeavor to understand each other and bring minds closer together.

To open the general discussion the chairman took the initiative and asked the first question. Preparatory to that he devoted several minutes to present a summary of a very important principle which is vital to the issues which are discussed in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM. We realized at once from his summary of the issue that he is an extraordinarily "good reader."

The chairman declared that a very fundamental proposition in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM pertained to the problem regarding the meaning of *brotherly love.* (We use the terms, brotherly love and neighborly love, interchangeably.) He said: PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM repeats the well-known formulation of the law of brotherly love as being, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, with the emphasis on the last two words, *as thyself.* Then he asked: what does it mean to love the neighbor *as thyself?*

No better subject could have been selected with which to begin the meeting, because the answer to this question is the basic proposition (*leitmotif*) of all the ethical principles of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM.

A Question On Neighborly Love

1. What does it mean to love the neighbor *as thyself?*

This is approximately what we answered. (We are adding a few ideas which we thought of afterwards; one always thinks of a lot of things *afterwards!*)

To emphasize loving the neighbor *as thyself* obviously makes yourself the standard. What do *you* want most—more than anything else—for *yourself* as a human being in relation to other human beings? The answer to this question is the key to how you love yourself. This is the answer regarding what *loving yourself* consists of: *to have the maximum freedom and be able to do what you want to do;* to wish *freedom for yourself* is to *love yourself,* because by freedom you can generally live the life you wish to live. Without that freedom you cannot make loving yourself mean much. The exercise of freedom is the foundation for you to be able to love yourself.

But there is an exception to that freedom. It is a very crucial exception, small in one sense and overwhelming in another, namely, you may not harm, be vengeful, fail to show charity or fail to proclaim the gospel. But these prohibitions *when looked at rightly,* do not really rob you of much freedom. There is a glorious liberty left outside the field of harming or failing to help the neighbor as defined. This great and wide liberty is the

priceless possession which a man has or should have as a human being.

The law of loving the neighbor does not require that we *like* him but only that we *love* him. To *love* him means (1) not to harm him (by violence, adultery, theft, falsehood, covetousness) and (2) to be forbearing and forgiving, and disposed to do him good even though he may have harmed us. Further, that (3) we show him *charity,* that is, give him help when he really needs it. Finally, (although not mentioned in the meeting because it was assumed) we (4) owe it to the neighbor to proclaim the gospel to him. In short, to love the neighbor is (1) to do him no harm; (2) to be forbearing and forgiving and do him good; (3) show him charity if necessary in our own judgment, and (4) inform him of the gospel. So much, BUT NO MORE. If we wish to do more, that is each person's private affair. Let him do as much more as *he* wishes.

The liberty which you want for yourself must be allowed to the neighbor also. He must be permitted by you to live his life his own way, according to his inclinations, except he also may not harm you or others, etc. This forbids all coercion of neighbors by you or by him. You must leave neighbors *free.* That is the greatest way to show your love to him. We then get this definition of brotherly love as love equal to the love for thyself:

You want for yourself:

a. Liberty in all matters,
b. Except
   (1) do no harm to neighbor
   (2) show forbearance toward him
   (3) show charity toward him
   (4) declare gospel to him

and so, if you love your neighbor *as yourself* you wish him to have exactly the same. *Then* you love your neighbor *as yourself.*

We have then added the positive idea of *liberty* to the negatives in the commandments. This positive idea of liberty may appear to be only a small residual left after the prohibitions of the commandments slice off a large part of life. But that is not

the correct view of the commandments. Exactly the reverse is true. The Decalogue leaves a man's life *free* and grand and wide, except that it slices off only an evil segment of life, and the loss of that evil segment, looked at in perspective, does not cramp life at all.

But then we add another corollary. If the foregoing is *love* to the neighbor as *to oneself,* and if no more is required for loving the neighbor, then you have no further obligation. He is on his own and you are on your own. You cannot or should not try to live his life and he cannot or should not try to live your life. To do that is evil and intrinsically compulsion and coercion and sin. Stop trying to be a do-gooder beyond what we have outlined.

That you undertake more obligations than Scripture requires (as we have just outlined) is to extend the law of love. That *extension*—that hyper-piousness—has the effect of making Christian ethics ridiculous and *evil.* It is evil and sinful that we try to live each other's lives, and meddle around in each other's affairs. *The unwarranted extension of the law of love beyond what Scripture teaches makes that law of love exactly the same as the law of love that communism teaches.* Communism teaches a law of love which goes beyond what has just been defined as neighborly love, and which is harder to fulfill than what the Christian law of love teaches. Communism basically requires that you must love your neighbor *more* than yourself. You must live *for* him. That communist extension, against which we warn because it is not taught in Scripture, is the exact extension that communists hope Christians will accept.

If modern Calvinism insists on adopting the identical definition of love which communism teaches, it places itself in a most vulnerable position. How can modern Calvinism teach different practical ethics if its most basic premise—on how to love the neighbor—is identical with communism? If the premises are identical, the conclusion must be identical.

There are really only two definitions of brotherly love: (1) that everybody properly minds his own business, or (2) that everybody meddles with everybody's business.

Confused Christians may favor number (2), namely, that we all meddle into each other's affairs, but they always naively limit the idea that we shall only meddle into each other's affairs *for their good.* But this is about as unrealistic as anything can be. Is there no *total depravity?* It is precisely that meddling into our neighbor's affairs *for ill* that we do all the time by coercion, adultery, theft, falsehood, covetousness.

If you want the right to meddle into your neighbor's life and regulate it, but do not want him to meddle into your life and regulate it, then you do not love your neighbor as yourself.

The nonprecise reasoners among us may be dissatisfied with this precise definition of *neighborly* love, especially as distinguished from *parental* love, or *conjugal* (matrimonial) love, or so-called *love among the "brethren."* They may define all these "loves" as being identical. But in these other "loves" some additional element is naturally and properly added. Defining all kinds of love as being identical with neighborly love is invalid.

Furthermore, there are the sentimentalists. They want such love to mean that everybody should be "holding hands" with everybody else. For them brotherly love is an emotional phenomena, almost completely disassociated from just conduct, freedom and forbearance. It is beyond the scope of this report of a meeting to rebut this misrepresentation of what Scripture teaches.

There are sentimentalists in Calvinist circles who talk of "community" and organic unity. Their idea is that to love is to like. Further that to fail to like is sin—a violation of the law of love. But this idea of the *obligation to like* as being the definition of brotherly love finds no real basis in Scripture. Instead of binding men's choices in a requirement that they must like (and even must like equally), Scripture gives only those four specific objective requirements which we have previously listed. In regard to *love* Scripture does not play with words or prattle about immeasurable subjective attitudes; it deals instead with obvious, external, measurable, definite realities.

There is outside the churches a similar sentimentalism and mysticism. Men who practically deify the state as Hegel did and

as the various socialist-communists (and also the welfare-staters) do, also have a vague, elusive and vicious presupposition of some brotherly or neighborly obligation towards neighbors individually and collectively.

All these "love" ideals are unrelated to the practical, limited, hard-headed, beneficent definition of brotherly and neighborly love in Scripture. All those definitions are hyper-pious, collectivistic, hypocritical, unattainable, frustrating and depressing.

There is one class of moralists about love to whom we wish to make special mention, namely, those *A*'s who love the *B*'s so much that they coerce all the *C*'s to help the *B*'s. This is a doctrine of love which has a particularly odious hypocrisy about it. The world is full of such "lovers"—people who would love another never at their own expense but at the expense of third parties.

Readers cannot understand all this fully without first reading earlier issues of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM which are almost entirely on the subject of neighborly love: February, March, April and May, 1955.

A Question On The Relationship Of Christianity To Prosperity

2. From the floor the question was asked to the effect: Is it sound to say that prosperity definitely results from obeying God's commandments? Does not experience indicate that obeying God's commandments does not uniformly make men prosperous, but even sometimes the reverse? This question challenges Declaration No. 5 of the Progressive Calvinism League. The declaration reads:

> (a) Promote confidence that prosperity obtained in a *free* market society is the result of obedience to the law of God; and (b) discontinue all apologies for that prosperity and all policies which will undermine that prosperity.

We presented in our first issue, January 1955, a brief explanation of this declaration. See that issue.

Some of our explanatory statements in the January 1955 issue need more careful formulation than we gave them.

In the first place, we do not mean by *prosperity* merely *material riches.* We mean by it a pleasant earthly life, a life you can live to suit your own inclinations (except to sin). This kind of comfortable or good life might mean a modest life on a college campus, in pleasant physical surroundings, with delightful intellectual stimulation, long summer vacations, sabbatical years for study and travel. Of course, you will not get rich in material goods doing that, but you will still be "rich" because you are living your life *your* way, as you wish to spend it on earth on mundane matters. A man cannot expect wealth if he does not work for it. Nor can he enjoy the intellectual life, if he fails to do what that requires. And so prosperity means (in our thought) the *good* life, the one you specifically want to live, and that is certainly not limited to Cadillacs and town and country houses and great luxury. It means other kinds of lives than the mere acquisition of wealth.

But, we regretfully admit, the *good life* does not always follow from adherence to Christianity as certainly as a physical effect follows a physical cause, for several reasons:

(a) *Private* evil interferes with that natural cause and effect;
(b) *Public* evil also interferes;

and then we should have added a third qualification, namely,

(c) God in his inscrutable wisdom (but probably for the benefit of our souls) afflicts us. Consider the case of Job.

These are sweeping qualifications. We mentioned (a) and (b) inadequately in our January 1955 issue, but we wholly neglected (c).

In regard to the question: Is there a *normal* cause and effect relationship between obedience to the commands of God, as cause, and a resulting good life (prosperity, living as we wish) as effect—to that question our answer was and is *Yes.* All Scripture teaches it. We can fill a book of solid references to support this. Scripture teaches that God rewards the good and

punishes the evil. If it does not teach that, then the world and morality are upside down.

We hold, therefore, tenaciously to the conviction that the *general* rule in this world in the past was, today is, and in the future will be that temporal rewards result from conduct in obedience to God's laws, and that temporal penalties follow conduct in disobedience to God's laws. As a qualification we admit that coercion (power), exercised by individuals and by men collectively (governments), interferes with these laws. Further, we admit that the inscrutable providence of God *seems* occasionally to interfere with the general rule.

This last factor touches on a moot question among Christian Reformed Calvinists—the question of *common grace*. God makes "his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). This sounds like a statement against Declaration No. 5, that is, that there are neither punishments nor rewards for different kinds of conduct.

In this connection we told the meeting that there are obvious logical contradictions in various ideas about *common grace* and *total depravity*. If a man has sufficiently naive ideas about cosmogony (how the world is put together and functions), he can also have—he must of necessity have—correspondingly naive ideas about "grace." Sometime we hope to cover these ideas possibly under the title, "Playing Tiddlely-Winks With Words." Much of what passes for doctrinal profundity on "grace" is plainly unrealistic.

We told the meeting: *of course* the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Imagine a square of ten miles on each side, with quarter-section farms owned by "believers" and "unbelievers"; the holdings of each type of owner are distributed throughout the whole area; and then God because of some "grace" idea should keep the rain and sun off the plots of the "unbelievers" and should bountifully dispense them on the adjacent plots of the "believers"! Such *discrimination* in natural affairs by the *providence* of God would be so absurd and unworkable, that Christ simply called attention to an idea of such elementary common sense that there is no proof of "common grace" to be derived from such a text.

For PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM therefore, common grace (whatever some may define that to be) does not reduce the *general* validity of our Declaration No. 5.

This question of the relationship of morality to prosperity (as we have defined it) has a peculiar relationship to Calvinism. One of the major socio-religious-economic theories advanced in the last half century is that there has been a peculiarly close relationship between Calvinism and capitalism; Calvinism is supposed to have nurtured capitalism. The most famous German sociologist of the preceding generation, Max Weber, wrote a book on that subject, *The Prostestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1952). (He quoted statistics that if you are a Calvinist you are likely to be more prosperous than other religious groups (except Jews).) Here, then, is Weber, who is considered a great authority, proclaiming that *prosperity* follows in a special sense from being a Calvinist (as distinguished from having some other religion). We are not subscribing to all that Weber wrote, but this we admit: the brand of Calvinism which we accept has exactly that "ethic" in it which Weber declared promotes capitalism and prosperity. We mention this merely because Weber confirms our Declaration No. 5 in his own way. We plan to devote the next issue to Weber's idea.

Are We Our Brothers' Keepers?

3. Are we our brothers' keepers, or not? This was not a direct question from the floor but was assumed or suggested by one of the men present.

The chairman immediately called attention to the fact that Cain merely asked a "rhetorical question," and that it could not be properly inferred from Cain's question that we are our brothers' keepers.

Here again the determining consideration is: what does loving our neighbor require—are we our neighbor's *keeper?* Yes, but only in so far as the law of neighborly love extends. Beyond that we are not our brother's keeper.

We are not obligated to support our neighbor; we do not need to "keep" him. If he needs help *in our opinion* (not his

opinion or anybody else's opinion) we must exercise *charity* towards him. That charity is dispensed at the giver's discretion and not on the recipient's demand, or the declaration of some pious third person. The man who "has" may be of the opinion that the man who "has not" will be injured by charity. A beggar reeking of liquor may ask for a quarter for a sandwich and whine about his hunger, but a man may be well-advised to refuse it, because the quarter may go for more liquor.

Professional social workers think very poorly of unorganized charity and payments to uninvestigated recipients of charity. Those social workers always substitute *their own* judgment for that of the recipient. It is a practical necessity to do that. This is true not only of secular charities, but also is (or should be) of religious charities or private Christian benefactions. The *giver's* judgment must prevail over the recipient's judgment. This is an essential ingredient in charity, or else what is done is no longer charity but something else.

Charity, it should be noted, is really inconspicuous in Scripture. Moses allowed the poor the *gleanings* of the field. The tax for charity according to Moses was a tithe, a mere 10%. Scripture, looked at in perspective, is not large-hearted regarding charity; a man can keep 90% of his income! It is not the largeness of the scriptural demands, but the smallness that should cause surprise. No tyrant or people in all history is so modest as God is in taxing and making demands on men.

But what has been written does not leave any man free of the obligation of charity, of giving mutual aid. We have not written what we have written about not being our brother's keeper and about charity in order to reduce any man's inclination toward helping a neighbor *who is in need and when the "help" will do the neighbor some genuine good.* Charity is as necessary in society as oil in a motor. Let the oil run dry in a motor and the motor will be ruined. Let charity run dry in society and society will be ruined. We are enthusiastic about charity.

We are not disputing about helping a brother or about charity. We are disputing the *extent of the claim* for "keeping" a brother and for charity.

Cain indicated that his idea of being his brother's keeper was so limited that he could injure the brother, slay him. Of course, *in that sense* of not slaying a brother we are his keeper. And so it all depends, as we said before, on what is meant by "brother's keeper." Here is the gamut of ideas involved in being our "brother's keeper":

Injuring him.	Not injuring him, leaving him free, scriptural charity, forbearance, and gospel.	Supporting him, and regulating his life for him. Extensive sharing.
Cain said brotherly love did not cover this segment.	PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM's idea of being brother's keeper. No more than this; no less.	Communist and interventionist and welfare state ideas of being the "brother's keeper."

We reject both extremes of being a brother's keeper. We accept only the intermediate definition and requirement.

We talked in the meeting about a very modern idea, namely, *progressive* income taxtation, that is, as the income goes up, the tax *rate* "progresses" upward still faster and may even amount to about 90% of very large incomes.

This popular "modern" idea (in violation of the Eighth and Tenth Commandments) was apparently unknown to Moses. Strange, we have often thought, that if *progression* in tax or charity was a sound and obligatory idea—strange that God never thought of it or at least neglected to instruct Moses to specify a progressive obligation in regard to charity and taxes. But He did not. If Karl Marx, socialists-communists and interventionists are right about the progressive tax, then all the writers in Scripture have surely been uninformed.

Here again the interesting phenomenon is that ancient Scripture teaches a sound and not a destructive policy. *Sound* modern economics can do only one thing, namely, condemn the progressive income tax. True social science and Scripture agree.

The Danger Of Materialism

4. Reference was made to the danger of materialism.

This involves a profound problem. Every reference to materialism disturbs us, because we are sensitive that the charge of *materialism* might be made against PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM albeit incorrectly and unjustly. We do not consider ourselves to be materialistic, but merely candid and honest about materialism.

All Christians are in some sense materialistic. But everything depends on what is meant by *materialism.* Does it mean:

1. Desire for *consumable* things (luxuries)
2. Desire for ownership of *productive things* (capital)
3. Unwillingness to participate in charity
4. Consumption of natural resources
5. Self-interest versus group interest
6. Indifference to the service of God

Materialism can mean any of these. We do not consider PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM to be materialistic on any of these counts except number (2).

It would be natural to change the foregoing questions into a form that "begs the question," e.g.,

1. Excessive desire for luxuries
2. Excessive desire for wealth
3. Miserliness
4. Waste
5. Exploitation of others
6. Irrational denial of a Creator

We are against all of these. In that sense we are not, and never will be, materialistic.

What is an *excessive* desire for luxuries? And what are *luxuries?* Mises, in a very short article in the August 1956 issue of *The Freeman,* declares that what were luxuries for our ancestors are *necessaries* for us. Also, what are necessaries for us today are luxuries for Hindus and Chinese today. What preacher, for example, in the United States has given up the "luxury" of an automobile in order to provide extra funds for missions in Africa?

The answer will be that in the United States automobiles are practically necessaries. But is this materialism?

The problem of *materialism* was too big for us to handle in the meeting, and we did not discuss it. Some other time maybe.

Two Ways To Look At The State

5. It was inevitable that the relation of men to the state would come into the discussion.

We pointed out that Scripture sounds two entirely distinct notes on the character of the state:

(a) The Apostle Paul talked about "the powers that be" and that the state is from God. (The context shows that Paul *assumes* a beneficent government.)

(b) The Apostle John, languishing in banishment on the island of Patmos, saw the eventual state as a monstrous thing—the Great Beast, and the agent of the anti-Christ. (The context shows that John *assumes* a malignant government.)

(c) The Apostle Peter took two separate positions about the state: (1) in one instance, a position identical with Paul's, based on Paul's assumption; see the statement in I Peter 2:13-17; and (2) in the other instance, a non-partisan position with the only really universal perspective, namely, that the state should be appraised *depending on what it in fact is,* and that conduct should be accordingly, namely, to obey or to disobey, *because* "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). This is the *general* rule to which we in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM *hold.*

We make no assumptions that the state is generally good or generally bad. We obey a good state, and we recommend resistance against a bad state.

We reserve to ourselves the right to decide whether the men in the government are obeying God or not, and to obey or not to obey accordingly. There is a very effective way to make the law of God of no effect whatever, and that way consists in accepting whatever government exists and obeying that government when it is bad. In PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM we are not so fatuous as to believe that *all* governments enjoy the blessing of God and should be obeyed just because they exist, maybe even by violence or fraud, nor are we teaching any doctrine that we must obey men rather than God.*

Our Quotations From Rousseau And Machiavelli

6. The chairman questioned the reliance in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM on statements of Rousseau and of Machiavelli, two men whose repute is not the best among Christians. Why, he asked, quote and use in arguments, statements of men of such disrepute? (Or a question to that effect.)

Firstly, we quoted these men because we estimated that the mere quotation from them would shock readers to attention. We are sure that our estimate of the rhetorical advantage of the use of these quotations is correct.

Secondly, we answered that there was a great difference between Rousseau and Machiavelli. We despise the ideas of Rousseau, but for many of the ideas of Machiavelli we have profound respect.

In regard to Rousseau, son of a Swiss preacher, we quoted him favorably only once, because we would almost say that that

*The Christian Reformed church has a decision in its Synodical Minutes which is based *solely* on the premise that the laws of a government may be permitted to supersede the law of God. This premise is basic in some of the thinking of the Rev. Gerrit Hoeksema, a most influential leader in the denomination. This same premise influences the thinking of the editors of *The Reformed Journal*, a publication deviating radically from traditional premises. We believe that even in the Christian Reformed church God should be obeyed rather than men.

was the only time he was right. Rousseau attacked the idea of the "divine right of kings." We believe Rousseau's argument on that is drum-tight and conclusive. It cannot, logically, be improved upon. We are against the divine right of kings. The proposition on which that is based is that God specially selected all the rulers of the earth, and that they have God's approval, and a sort-of pipe line of power from God to those rulers, whether good or bad.

The claim of the "*divine* right of kings" is a counterfeit claim. What astonishes and alarms us is that members of Calvinist churches, for example, the Christian Reformed, today hold to an identical doctrine, namely, the *divine* right of any existing government. All they do is substitute "any existing government" for "kings." (See footnote on page 241.)

Rousseau had no more finished his sound argument against the *divine* right of kings before he set up a whole series of ideas regarding society and government which were as wrong as the idea of the divine right of kings. Rousseau made an attack on the divine right *of kings;* he did not really attack the *divine right* phase of the idea which usually means unrestricted right.

It is not possible for Rousseau or anyone to get along without a state. And so he theorized about a new and better state set up on the basis of the "general or common will." To this new state, representing the popular majority, he immediately granted so much authority and liberty to exercise any authority it wished that it was practically based upon "*divine rights*" of its own. See June 1955 issue of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, pages 154-158.

Some members of the Christian Reformed church have with Rousseau abandoned the idea of divine right *of kings.* But to the government which exists in place of a monarchic government, they grant as much "divine" rights as any king claimed; they attack the location (*locus*) of divine right in a king and accept it in a people and their representatives; we attack the *divine* right idea itself, as never possibly resting in a person or a people

but only in the law of God. Rousseau's ideas all constitute foundation stones for eventual socialism-communism. He prepared the seed-bed for the French Revolution. We summarize, then, in regard to Rousseau—away with the man's ideas!

In regard to Machiavelli, we know his notorious reputation, but for us Machiavelli falls in a different class. Generally, we admire the man. We know that he gave advice on how to assassinate somebody. It is good advice regarding *method.* If we ever take to assassination we shall follow it; it is this: give no warning sound, threat, movement,—nothing; just *stab.* Otherwise, Machiavelli says, you may get killed yourself.

Machiavelli picked out some of the most sensational of his ideas and sent them to one of the Medici in order to get back into favor and return to Florence. (He was in banishment.) These are the essays in his little book, *The Prince.* But read *all* of Machiavelli's essays (*The Discourses,* Modern Library) and the impression is different. Here is a man with magnificently wise and penetrating judgment (as well as apparent cynicism). We look on Machiavelli as an unregenerate *Calvinist.* He had exactly the same estimate of mankind as Calvinism has, towit, *totally* depraved. Most people object to Machiavelli's realism; they object to old-fashioned Calvinism for an identical reason.

We are not, be it noted, agreeing to everything Machiavelli wrote. Read the man's main work, *The Discourses;* you will then appreciate him.

Acridity

7. The chairman "took me to task." He quoted various parts of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, and declared that he considered them sarcastic and even "*acrid.*"

If you look up the word *acrid* in a dictionary you will read the following: "of a cutting or burning taste; bitter; acrimonious." The charge caught me completely "off guard." A public meeting is hardly the place to justify an attitude.

I acknowledged and continue to recognize that an "acrid" approach to differences of views is not the ideal or effective approach. It is not a suitable means to an end.

I accepted the firm protest of the chairman, and said I would change my methods. That was and is my intention.

Denominational Criticism

8. In the foregoing connection (or some other, I forget) the chairman also questioned criticism of the denomination to which we both belong.

Everyone who knows what is going on realizes that there are wide differences of views in the Christian Reformed church. There is no reason why they should not be vigorously explored.

We have not begun a publication to criticize Mohammedanism, nor Confucianism, nor Catholicism, nor Christian Science. We are not adherents of any of those systems of thought. There is something inappropriate about by-passing oneself and criticizing what is far away.

Nor do we think there is a small speck in the eye of Calvinism. We are not spending our money because we believe the troubles of modern Calvinism are trifling foibles. We consider the modern church to be apostate to scriptural teaching on various points. It is not always the formal doctrine that is wrong but the unwillingness to apply it.

We do not have money to put out some "meditations" or to flatter our brethren with fine words. Nor have we funds to criticize those not associated with us. This publication is by deliberate policy self-analytical of the specific, small group to which we belong.

We are not a reform movement for the world, or the United States, or all Christian churches, but for a specific small denomination. But we consider the significance of this to be beyond denominational lines.

Equality As A Goal In Life; Is It Scriptural?

9. A member of the Reading Club called attention to the teaching of Scripture in regard to *equality*. The idea sounded new and surprising to us. However, he had a text which was

the basis for his question. The text is in II Corinthians 8:14. It reads:

> But by equality: your abundance being a supply at this present time for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want; that there may be equality.

There can be no question that this text has in it something intended to promote "equality." But the context was unfamiliar to us.

We were, therefore, obliged to plead ignorance of the idea specifically involved in this statement.

We then shifted and made our answer general. This is what we said:

1. Single texts can hardly be used as the basis for a major doctrine. Every theologian takes the position that it is the *current* (prevailing and general) teaching of Scripture which should prevail, not isolated statements.

2. Scripture does not teach a *general* doctrine of equality. It teaches charity, but charity is not designed to establish general equality but to relieve distress.

3. It is unfortunate to think in terms of equality, or to make many comparisons between people. Somebody must come out poorly in the comparison. Comparisons are invidious—damaging to somebody. A man should be compared with his own past and not with his neighbor.

4. Inequality, or better said, *differences* between men are something for which to thank God. It is the *differences* in men that hold society together, not their likenesses. If we were all equal in everything, *no cooperation between men would be necessary nor would it exist.* Cooperation—voluntary and therefore brotherly and neighborly—can exist only between *A* and *B* when *A* does something and *B* does something *else,* and they then exchange *voluntarily and willingly,* that is, in a brotherly manner. But if there are no advantages in that, then society lacks cement. *Differences* in men are a God-given blessing.

5. Equality can hardly be a goal of Scripture because it would be out of harmony with creation. Inequality, or rather difference (variety), is a basic element in creation. God made the world infinitely *varied*. We do not think that it should be the duty of man to make everything "*equal*," and by so doing undo what God created to be different.

Since the meeting we have examined the specific text in II Corinthians 8:14 more carefully. The text when originally quoted was obscure (to us).

We happen to have a Dutch Bible which is an excellent edition with helpful chapter summaries at the beginning of each chapter. With the help of those chapter summaries we come to the conclusion that Chapters 8 and 9 in II Corinthians are on the same subject, towit, *charity collections for the poor in Jerusalem*. Readers may remember that we questioned the early enthusiasm of the church in Jerusalem by which it dissipated the assets of the members in a spree of mismanagement which could have only one result—future poverty exactly in proportion to the current spending of capital. (See pages 33-35 in the February 1955 issue of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM.) This prostrated the Jerusalem congregation for years. Struggling new and foreign churches were asked to collect for the original church in Jerusalem. Chapters 8 and 9 are a case in point; Paul is trying to raise money in Corinth, Greece to ameliorate poverty in Jerusalem. The Macedonian churches are mentioned by Paul as examples of good contributors. The Corinthian church had had some intentions to collect, but Paul makes it clear that they had failed to perform. There had been only the "will." He writes about sending Titus and one or two others to drum up the money. (Readers are requested to read the two chapters; if they do not they will have difficulty following the explanation.)

The introductory summary in the Dutch Bible for Chapter 8 reads as follows (translated):

> Paul tells the Corinthians of the generous charity of the Macedonian churches to the poor in Jerusalem, and declares he had instructed Titus to work on the Corinthi-

> ans to get a similar collection. Paul points to the example of Christ who became poor to make us rich, and admonishes them to accomplish their original intention but not so that they themselves would be deprived but to contribute out of their abundance. He makes an analogy of the manna in the desert (Exodus 16:13). Titus is being sent by Paul to collect the money; another appointed by the congregation [at Jerusalem or Macedonia?—FN] is accompanying Titus; and also a third man of good repute in the estimation of Paul and the congregations.

This was quite a delegation, *three* men travelling internationally, to use their influence to get from the Corinthian congregation funds for the poor in Jerusalem. The collection expense was certainly high.

The summary of Chapter 9 reads as follows (translated):

> The apostle testifies that he has adequate assurance of the good intentions of the Corinthians to promote this collection. He gives reasons why he has sent the three men to them, namely, so that everything would be ready by the time he arrived himself. He admonishes them to contribute well, giving various arguments for generosity drawn from God's blessing, love and mercy. He refers to the gratitude to God which will result from their contribution by those who receive it, and to the prayers which the recipients will make to God for the Corinthians.

Obviously, this is a high-powered collection campaign induced by the urgent need at Jerusalem and by Paul's wish to have funds in order to make good his promise at the great dispute mentioned in Galatians 2 where the settlement included a divi-

sion of territory between Paul and the original apostles and where Paul committed himself to collect money (verse 9):

> And when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision [Jews]; only they would that we should remember the poor [at Jerusalem]; which very thing I was also zealous to do.

If readers will themselves have read these two chapters (with the assistance of the foregoing summaries), they will reach the following conclusions, I believe:

1. The references are to *charity* only, and not to the social order. The *equality* to which reference is made is therefore limited to charity and not to general equality.

2. The *equality* to which Paul refers is really reciprocity —you help them now, and they will help you at another time; "your abundance being a supply at this present time for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want." This "breadth of view" about charity, namely, that what it costs now may be offset by what you get back later is a valid idea to which we called attention on page 102, paragraph 5, in the April 1955 issue. This is not an argument addressed to pure charity but just the contrary, long-term self-interest.

3. These charities are not a *claim,* and Paul is very careful to say that he is *not assessing* them. In Chapter 8 verse 3 he says that the Macedonians "gave of their own accord," and not in response to an assessment. Then he writes in verses 7 and 8a (our italics):

> But as ye abound in everything, in faith and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. *I speak not by way of commandment...*

Paul here is keeping charity on the basis it must be kept if it is to remain charity. All compulsory "charity" is no longer charity. He does not speak "by way of *commandment.*"

We continue therefore to believe that there is nothing in Scripture which teaches "equality" in any socio-economic sense. We think the *current* or *prevailing* or *general* teaching of Scripture is against it.

We are indebted to the Reading Club member for bringing up his very interesting point.

Exploitation Of The Poor By The Rich

10. Unfortunately, this report is being written several weeks after the event and we cannot remember everything clearly. But somehow or other the question came up of the exploitation of the poor by the rich, and particularly exploitation of the poor *in the past.* Someone, I believe, implied that employers in earlier generations exploited their employees, and that unions are to be thanked for ending the exploitation and for raising the standard of living.

That idea—that unions *really help* the employee—is, we believe, wholly erroneous. There is no more to it, than there is water in a mirage in the desert. However, that statement is so contrary to the almost universal opinion of mankind that to state the two contrary views—that unions have helped employees, versus that unions have not helped employees—is to stir up a real argument.

Let us look at the question historically first.

Originally the union movement was a "craft" movement. Union members were *only* the skilled workers. Those unions "helped" their members. *But at whose expense?* Somebody must have lost what the skilled worker gained. And who lost? *The unskilled worker.* The public program of the craft unions was on that basis: "we are skilled; we will not let you in unless you are skilled; you cannot have our wage rates."

Craft unionization did not result in greater production. Therefore, there could be only a different "distribution" of what the employees got; if the skilled got more, the unskilled got less. All economists have recognized that.

More recently the union movement was extended to the unskilled as well as the skilled. John L. Lewis was a proponent of *universal* unionization. The Christian Labor Association holds to the same idea. But if everybody is in the union, then the skilled can no longer get more *at the expense of* the unskilled. Who pays the piper now?

In the first place, there are many people who are not yet in unions, particularly white collar workers. They are partly footing the bill.

But the theory of the Christian Labor Association and all other unions is that the employer is footing the bill. That natural exploiter! It is their idea that if it were not for the unions, employers would be making excessive profits.

That may occasionally be true, but basically it is incorrect. It can be shown by rigorous reasoning that *the employer cannot be stripped of his basic return.* It was beyond the scope of the meeting to explain that there, and it is beyond the scope of this report to explain that here.

There is no more chance that "capitalism" will not get its return than there is that labor will not get its return. (Adopt complete socialism and communism and the statement just made will still be true. We shall, D.V., show that some day.) A reader may laugh and say, who can resist power or coercion by a state; will not the laws and the police and the army enforce a law to see to it that capitalism does not get its "share"? No, the laws, the police, the army, the torture chamber will not change it. A great economist wrote an essay entitled, *Macht oder Oekonomisches Gesetz,* which in English reads "Might versus Economic Law." He explores the proposition that man-made laws can nullify "economic law." His reasoning to his conclusion is conclusive; men by laws, by *might,* cannot annul economic law. As Christians we would amend the statement:

men cannot mock God successfully; man-made laws do not annul (ever) laws of nature established by God.

But, someone will say, capitalists can be expropriated; society can seize capital. Then the capitalist has footed the bill.

Morality is not tested by short-term events. A bank robber can get himself a million dollars quickly on a fortunate robbery. The short-term effect is good for him—until he is caught. Eventually, he himself suffers a penalty.

Similarly, all legislative or administrative action to destroy the benefits of private property will be futile and destructive. Not only will the attempted result fail. There will also be a penalty, as well.

What will happen from universal unionization, with unions operating as do today the CIO, the AFL and the CLA?

First, the nonunion people will be injured some, *temporarily;* next, the employers will be injured some, *temporarily;* but the union members themselves will be injured as surely as the law of God exists. The sequence will be as follows:

1. Chronic unemployment will develop: the less efficient will not be hired because they cannot earn their pay. The higher the rates are above the natural price for labor, the more *chronic* unemployment there will be.

2. But there is a temporary escape from the penalty of chronic unemployment, namely, increases in product prices. These price increases will be above the natural market in order to pay for the labor rates above the natural market. Money will have to be expanded as a corollary step. This is inflationism. What does anyone gain if prices go up as much as labor rates do? This inflationism is the present official policy in the United States. If it eventually should work out successfully, Scripture is unreliable and the law of God can successfully be "mocked." (That has not yet ever happened and will not ever happen.) All that is needed is ample time to prove that might (*macht*) does not annul the commandments of God (in this case, either the Sixth Commandment or economic law (*oekonomisches Gesetz*)).

We expressed in the meeting our profound disagreement with the idea that employers one hundred years ago exploited their employees more than employees are exploited now. We ridiculed the idea that unions have raised the general standard of living. We did this by making a simple suggestion.

The Hindus and Chinese and East Indians are in really a poor way. But unions can make them prosperous! Why not; unions are supposed to have made Americans prosperous. Those poor Hindus and Chinese are being exploited by the rich, whether natives of those countries or of England or of the Netherlands. Now we recommend that George Meany, and Walter Reuther, and John L. Lewis, and Joe Gritter go over there and organize unions. Then (so the argument must go) presto! suddenly and wonderfully the Hindus and Chinese and East Indians will be as well off as American people! Does anyone believe it? Of course not; and by the same token they admit that labor agitation by labor leaders does not make John Public prosperous. The right way to look at most labor leaders is not as welfare-producers nor as benefactors of the employees nor as statesmen but as agitators trying to justify a psychology which is a flagrant violation of the Tenth Commandment. Generally, labor union leadership is a disreputable profession—morally.

We ask: if the agitation of a labor leader will not do any good for an East Indian, a Hindu, a Chinaman or an African employee, then what will do those people some good? The answer is, a policy, which is the exact opposite of that of any labor leader we know, and which is based on Scripture and also singularly Calvinistic, namely, active work, thrift, investment, and *safety of a free market return on capital.* We do not know a single labor union leader who basically admits this last requirement—safety of a *free market* (noncoercive) return on capital.

The way to improve the status of *all* men is to obey Scripture, and the result will surely be that *there will be more capital* PER CAPITA. It is the greater amount of *capital* PER CAPITA that raises the standard of living.

It is because there is far more *capital* PER CAPITA in the United States than anywhere else that we have a higher standard of living than anywhere else. Toss labor union leaders in Darius' lions' den and the lions will surely "have mastery over them" at once; the employees will not be worse off; eventually, better.

There is a very specific reason why our ancestors had a smaller income than we have. It is not because they were exploited. It is because there was then less *capital* PER CAPITA. All comparisons of standards of living today with those of a century ago are invalid—meaningless. The only correct reasoning which could result in properly crediting unions with developing a higher standard of living would be that all other conditions between now and a century earlier were unchanged—except unions. Therefore, then, the better standard of living now could *only* be ascribed to the unions because that is the only cause that is different. But the facts of economic life are denied by such fallacious reasoning. *Many* conditions have changed in that period, including the real cause of prosperity, namely, an increase in *capital* PER CAPITA.

Of course, the economic order for society cannot be explained in a few pages or in one meeting. We recommend to all readers as a policy:

1. Read and obey Scripture. You will be happy and wise and probably prosperous. In addition:

2. Read the writings of the *great* economists. Their secular teachings agree perfectly with Scripture. (There are many pseudo-economists whose ideas, taught extensively in colleges, violate Scripture.)

We might add, if you wish to read something which pays special attention to the subjects where Scripture and economics join, you will find PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM interesting reading.

* * *

There were other subjects discussed at the meeting, but enough for this time. Later we were asked: what room is there in true Calvinist thinking for social legislation, such as, im-

provement of working conditions, minimum wage laws, etc.? We would like to answer such questions, but these (as were all the other questions) are too big for us to answer at one time.

fn

Some Observations On Reading Clubs

Some years ago we occasionally attended a Reading Club in another city.

Originally several of the members had helped to organize a club to read novels. Novels are easy reading and the club had grown to be a big thing. Some then wanted to read more serious books; that would inevitably reduce the number who would be interested.

This second Reading Club, reading only serious books on public and social problems, turned out to be an equally great success. The members were loyal to it and active.

The membership was not large but unusual: a wealthy widow of a well-known manufacturer; the chief editorial writer of a great daily newspaper; the biggest investment banker in the state and his wife; a Unitarian minister; a well-known pediatrician and his wife; a lady president of a girls' college; the financial vice-president of a large corporation and his wife; the executive vice-president of one of the city's largest banks and his wife. There were occasional visitors by invitation.

The *place* of meeting was the apartment of the widow.

The *time* was once every two weeks on Monday night at eight o'clock sharp until ten o'clock equally sharp. At two or three minutes to eight the automatic elevator might be packed going up to the apartment.

Extensive care was given to the selection of books to read. The men took turns at reading aloud; some were extraordinarily expert, as the Unitarian minister. The women usually

brought along some knitting or sewing. They did not read but participated in the discussion.

The book was not read in advance by any members. They came to each meeting without knowing what would come up. The reading, in fact, was only a starting point. It would be frequently interrupted by discussion. This was the "give and take" of ideas. Everybody joined in. The discussion was courteous, deferential, mild, honest and sincere, but views differed widely and the arguments were animated. As these were not ordinary people, the dialectic (disputation, reasoning, argument) was excellent.

On disputed questions of fact or on the history of ideas there was frequent reference to an Encyclopedia Britannica which was available.

Refreshments were never served; the time was too valuable. As the clock struck ten the guests got up, thanked the hostess, greeted each other farewell and left.

This Reading Club was a wonderful institution. It enriched the life of the lonely widow. It was a pleasant "evening out" for the other participants, none of whom had time to waste at cards or theatricals (as Thomas Jefferson wrote to his daughter: "no card playing there among genteel people—that is abandoned to blackguards"). In a way, "social obligations" were fulfilled *en masse* saving a great deal of time which would otherwise be lost in individual visits.

But the great thing that the *good* books did for the group was that it "elevated" the whole tone of the meeting. Those present did not talk "small talk," or deal in trifles or gossip. Instead they enriched each other's lives with new ideas and convictions, corrections and supplements.

Readers of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM should consider establishing such reading clubs. People of a quality to read this publication can profitably have a reading club to read controversial literature of all kinds. But no gossip; no small talk; read good material and bring and keep the discussion at that level. Have wives sit in. fn

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The September issue will give a brief statement how the Calvinists in the Netherlands and in England, in the Golden Age of Calvinism, defined *brotherly love* and *loving God above all.* That definition will not be the definition taught by some members of the faculty at Calvin College or Seminary nor the Free University of Amsterdam. But that definition will essentially agree with what PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM has published on those subjects.

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